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NATURALIST NOTEBOOK

JANUARY 1970

VOLUME VI

NO. 1

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Front Cover: "Pileated Woodpecker" by Alvah Sanborn. One of the animals native to our New England States that will be seen in our Jan. 25th Audubon Wildlife Film by John Bulger entitled "New England Saga".

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JANUARY

The Month Of Cold Temperatures

January is the month of cold temperatures. Almost always, at least once during the month, the temperature dips to around the 0° mark. On a cold and clear morning after a night of these frigid temperatures it is fun to get outside and see what effect the weather has had on things.

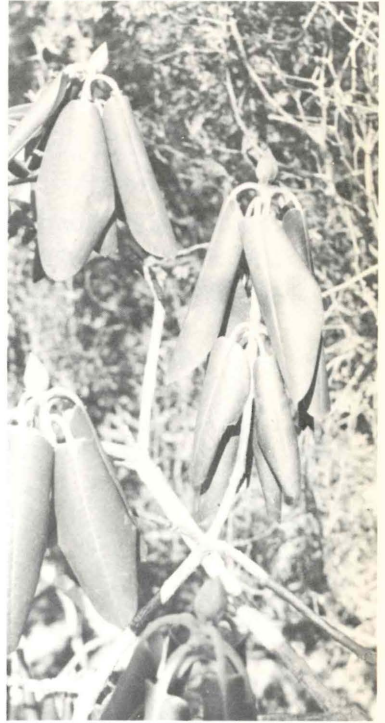


Photo by R. Dewire

All fresh water and the upper parts of our rivers which may be brackish freeze over solidly. A wind accompanying the cold and raising a spray off the surface of the water form pretty ice patterns along on rocks and plants along the shore.

Feeding stations become active with birds as they seek food. Their bodies must use up more energy to keep them warm in this weather so they need more food to build up their energy. You may notice that common birds such as juncos, white-throated sparrows and chickadees seem even more common during the frigid periods. One usual

visitor to your feeder probably won't be present though - the gray squirrel. When it gets this cold he goes into a sort of semi-hibernation, climbing into a hollow tree and staying there until the temperatures rise again.



Plant life is also affected. Most obvious are the broad-leaved evergreens such as mountain laurel and rhododendron. The leaves on these plants curl up when it gets very cold. They will open up again as it warms up. It is thought that these plants do this to prevent the loss of water in the cold weather.

Photo by R. Dewire

You should also feel the effects of the cold on yourself. Your cheeks sting, eyes may run if there's a wind, your ears tingle, and your breath may be short as you inhale the cold air for the first few times. All in all, it is an interesting time to go out and look at things around you.

JANUARY'S CALENDAR

ED. NOTE: Once more we will have observations listed here on the dates they were first noted the year before. Check these with what you find this year and see if your dates are earlier, later, or about the same as 1969.

January is the month of icicles and snow.

Dec. 30 - Jan. 7... The latest sunrises of the year. The sun comes up at 7:13 A.M.

January 7... Pine Siskins were visiting feeders by this time last year.

January 10... Few Evening Grosbeaks were reported at this time - most going further South. What's it like this year?

January 12... Rough-legged Hawks come down from the North to hunt rodents along the coast.

January 16... Mars is very bright setting in the western sky about 9:30 P.M.

January 19... Watch for Short-eared Owls in open fields sitting on the ground or on fence posts.

January 22... The full Wolf Moon shines on a cold clear night.

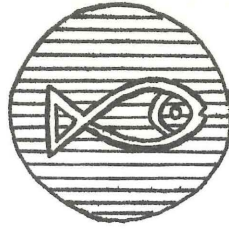
January 24... The uncommon Iceland Gull - an all white bird - may show up in flocks of our Herring Gulls.

January 28... Wintering shorebirds include Black-bellied Plovers, Ruddy Turnstones, Dunlins, and Purple Sandpipers along our coast.



ALONG THE SHORE

by *BARBARA KASHANSKI*



The emblem
of The New
England
Aquarium

"TO MAKE KNOWN THE WORLD OF WATER"

During the Thanksgiving weekend my family and I were in the Boston area. On Friday we visited the New England Aquarium at Central Wharf in Boston. What an interesting, educational and exciting place it was!

As soon as we entered the large concrete building, we were immediately drawn to a railing where people were gathered looking down. As we joined the crowd, we peered into a huge fresh water bay, 80 X 90 feet in area which was busy with swimming, crawling, digging fresh water creatures.

There are four levels to the Aquarium and the focal point of each level is a huge cylindrical tank in the center. This giant ocean tank holds 200,000 gallons of salt water. The largest salt water animals such as the huge marine turtles, sharks, and moray eels live in this naturally landscaped huge tank.

The other fishes and animals are grouped according to whether they are fresh or salt water inhabitants and also according to temperature requirements. If you've never seen a live penguin, here's your chance. Ever see an Indian otter, or sharks only a foot or so away, or a sea cucumber or large sea anemones in "bloom?"

There is also a special children's aquarium where there are dwarf sea horses, a tidal pool where the tide ebbs and flows just as it does along the shore, where youngsters are encouraged to handle the tidal pool creatures.

I could write pages on this fascinating place, but better than that, why don't you plan a visit to the New England Aquarium next vacation or some weekend. You'll love it!

NATURE PHOTOGRAPHY

Photos by Bill Morgan

Text by Bob Dewire

BIRDS AT A FEEDING STATION

Photographing birds is something that almost all amateur nature photographers have attempted at one time or another - often with limited success. Probably the best place to start off photographing birds is at a feeding station. You can usually get close enough here and the birds usually stay put long enough for you to snap the camera.

The pictures shown here were taken with a 35mm Miranda reflex camera. On the camera was a 300mm f5.6 lens. The film used was Tri-x and all pictures were shot at 1/250 sec. at f11.



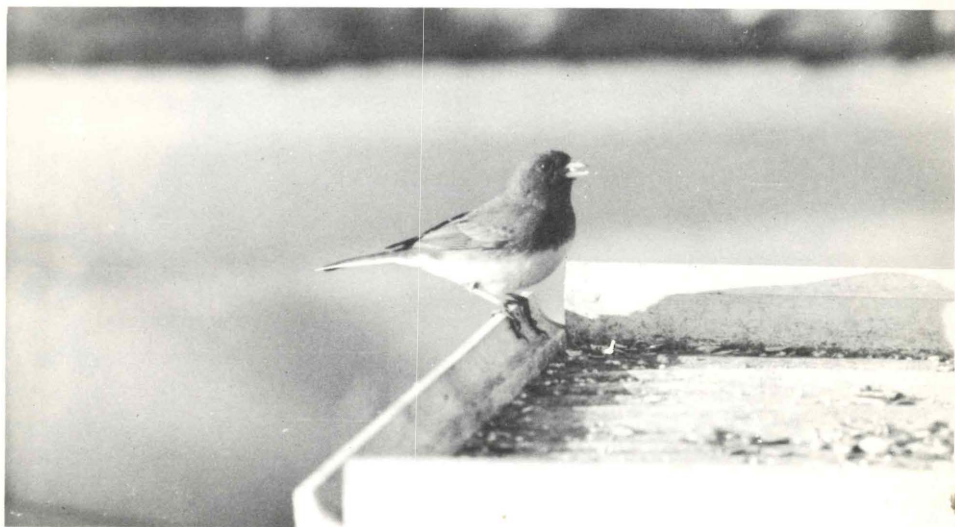
HOUSE FINCH

The heavy streaks on the stomach of the male (left) as well as the female house finch help determine this western transplant from our purple finch. For more information on this bird, see Vol. V, No. 11, of our NATURALIST NOTEBOOK.



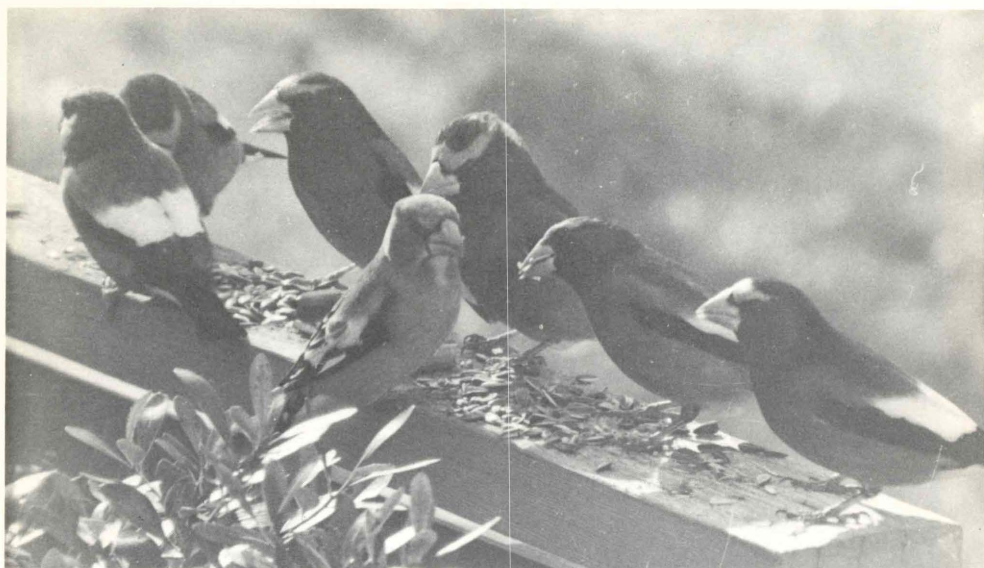
FOX SPARROW

This handsome bird is the largest of our sparrows. Like other sparrows it prefers to feed on the ground where it scratches for mix seed.



SLATE-COLORED JUNCO

One of our most common visitors to the feeders, the junco is actually a sparrow despite the lack of brown color. The white in his tail which flashes when he flies gives him the nickname "snowbird".



EVENING GROSBEEK

The spectacular grosbeaks are always impressive as they descend on a feeder in a noisy flock. They can be quite expensive boarders as they gobble up sunflower seeds at an amazing rate.



TUFTED TITMOUSE

Ten years ago the titmouse was a rare bird in Connecticut. Now there are few feeders that it doesn't visit. With patience they may feed from your hand like a chickadee.



WHITE-BREASTED NUTHATCH

This nuthatch is taking his favorite food (sunflower seeds) from the coconut feeder. Note the huge feet, short legs, and long claws - all adapted for his tree-trunk climbing.

ROCK HOUNDS

by JERRY THEILER

THE IRON ORES

There are three very important iron ores: Limonite, Magnetite, and Hematite. These three ores can be distinguished from each other by a few simple tests.

Magnetite is a black mineral that can be easily attracted to a magnet. Its powder is black. This can be seen on a streak plate or by observing the powder when two samples are rubbed together. Magnetite is the only iron ore that is magnetic.

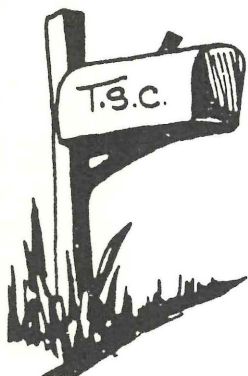
Limonite is usually yellow to dark brown. The powder of limonite is yellow-brown or light brown.

Hematite is an iron ore with a maroon or red-brown streak. The color of hematite varies from metallic silver to a dark red-brown.

Limonite and hematite vary greatly in hardness so this is not an important characteristic to consider.

All of these ores can be found in small quantities in eastern Connecticut. Magnetite is found in the sand by simply dragging a magnet through it, or in small crystal grains in solid rock. Limonite and hematite are simply forms of rust from other minerals. A watchful eye can find these minerals as rocks with iron weather and decompose.

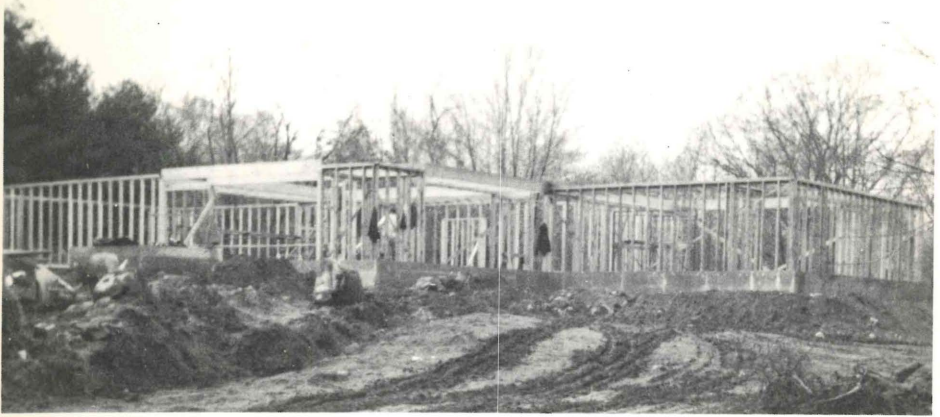
ARTICLES OF ADULT INTEREST



We welcome notice of Conservation activities or problems for inclusion in this section of the Naturalist's Notebook. . . . Please let us know of your local activity so that others may be aware of your efforts and lend their support where possible. . . .

AUDUBON WILDLIFE FILMS: This month we have two Wildlife Films scheduled at Palmer Auditorium, Connecticut College. The first is on Sunday, January 4th at 3:00 P.M. when Dr. Roger Tory Peterson, the famous ornithologist - artist will present his film "Galapagos - Wild Eden". The second is on Sunday, Jan. 25th at 3:00 P.M. with Dr. John Bulger showing his film "New England Saga" which presents the wildlife of our local region from its mountains to its coastline. We feel that these two films will be among the best we've ever offered. Tickets for these programs will be available at the door at \$2.00 for adults and \$1.00 for students. Members of the Science Center who plan to go to both of these programs and the final one in April can save a little money by buying a series ticket for all three programs at \$5.00 for adults and \$2.50 for students. These will also be available at the door.

MARK DOWN THIS DATE: On Wednesday, January 28, 1970, the Thames Science Center will have its Annual Dinner and Meeting for the adult members of the Center. Invitations will be mailed out shortly.



NEW BUILDING: As the picture above shows, construction of our new Interpretive Museum is well underway. Stop off at the site on Gallows Lane and see your Center going up.

THE PEOPLE SPEAK OUT: In addition to electing people to political offices, Election Day in November showed that people everywhere are becoming more aware of the importance of their environment and want to preserve it. Time Magazine cites the following examples. Voters in the Mojave Water District of California's San Bernardino County refused a coal burning power plant despite the increased taxes it would have contributed to the district because they feared the plant might have polluted the clear desert air. People in a Seattle suburb had a choice to preserve a wooded park or create a 9-hole community golf course. Voters decided by a 2 to 1 margin that conservation was more important than recreation.

Voters also seem willing to pay to protect their environment. In Maine, a \$50 million bond issue to build better municipal sewage treatment plants was approved while a \$21.5 million issue to build more highways was turned down. In New Jersey voters overwhelmingly approved a \$271 million bond issue to launch a massive clean water program. These signs of public concern are certainly encouraging in a time when we are reaching a critical point in the environmental crisis.

YOUR OWN NATURE JAUNT

by *BOB DEWIRE*

TO CAPE ANN, MASS. *

*Ed. Note: This year this column will present a series of all day trips that you can make to various areas of outstanding natural interest.

Cape Ann is one of the best areas within a day's drive to see the northern species of water birds that will not normally reach Connecticut. The best way to get there is to take I95 until it connects to Route 128 south of Boston. Go North on Rt. 128 and watch for exit 16 for Magnolia, Massachusetts. Take this and go along Rt. 127 until you come to the Hammond Museum, a spectacular castle that overlooks the ocean. Park in the parking lot and look out over the water. Common Goldeneyes should be numerous along with Red-breasted Mergansers and Buffleheads. The island off the museum, called Norman's Woe, should be watched very carefully for the beautiful and rare Harlequin Duck. It is one of the best places on the New England coast to find them.

Continue down Route 127 through the city of Gloucester where you will see the impressive Fisher-man's Statue. Follow signs for Eastern Point which will put you on Rt. 127A. Enroute to the point you will go past a large pond called Niles Pond. If it is not frozen, you may find Coot, Scaup, and Canvasbacks. At Eastern Point you can walk around the Coast Guard Station. Look along the large breakwater for the uncommon but regularly occurring Iceland and Glaucous Gulls - virtually pure white. Return to 127A and go along the road as it follows the coastline. Stop at random and marvel at the shore's awesome beauty with its large red rock formations, pounding surf, and green ocean. You will probably



Buffleheads Feeding Offshore

see all three species of Scoters - (Surf, White-winged and Common), Red-throated and Common Loons and many Horned Grebes.

The next major area is up above Rockport. Follow Route 127A through one of the most scenic of New England towns. The area known as Bearskin Neck with its narrow streets and many shops is well worth a detour. Here you will also find the famous lobster shack, "Motif #1", the number one subject of artists.

Leaving here Route 127A connects again to Route 127. Continue north past the Emerson Inn and take your next right. Follow it to the end which is called Andrew's Point - one of two outermost points on the Cape. The other is just north of this on Rt. 127 and is a State Reservation called Halibut Point. Park and walk out on either or both areas. Here are to be found the true ocean birds - Common Eiders, Gannets, and Black Guillemots which are regularly found. Others to look for include Barrow's Goldeneye, Kittiwakes, Dovekies, Murres, and Razor-billed Auks. This is also a good area to see Harbor Seals which swim lazily just offshore.

When you finish here, if you have taken your time and looked at most of the coastline, it is probably late afternoon. Route 127 will take you back to Rt. 128 which will get you back to Connecticut after a long but thoroughly rewarding day.

On Keeping Reptiles and Amphibians Over Winter*

by MIKE WALKER

TEMPERATURE

We cannot recommend keeping any wild animal as a household pet. In most cases it is illegal under present laws, and in addition, the problems of proper care and housing are enormous, even for nature centers and zoos. However, it is a fact that wild animal "pets" are becoming increasingly popular and are ever more readily available at pet shops and department stores.

Of all these unfortunate creatures that are offered for sale, probably the most hardy and manageable are some of the reptiles and amphibians, particularly certain snakes and turtles. Whether the animal is a native turtle or a South American Boa, winter can be a difficult time to maintain a healthy specimen. Proper temperature is one of the most important factors in keeping these animals in good condition.

65° - 70° is adequate for most salamanders, and 70° - 75° is sufficient for frogs and toads, but these temperatures are not high enough for most reptiles. Native turtles should be kept at 75° - 85°, and tropical turtles and most snakes do best at 80° - 85°. Since no room is ordinarily kept at these temperatures, it is necessary to heat the animal's cage itself. There are many ways to do this, including using an aquarium light, goose neck lamp, or burying non-thermostatic heat tape (the kind used to keep outdoor pipes from freezing) under the gravel in the cage. Adequate heat is extremely important. Our native amphibians and reptiles all hibernate in a natural state, and if they are not kept warm enough in winter they become lethargic and will refuse food for extended periods of time. This is not good for the animal because it is not really hibernating of course and it expends much more energy than others of its kind in the wild who are really dormant.

<p>*This is the first of several articles Mr. Walker will write concerning the care of reptiles and amphibians in the cold months.</p>
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FIELD NOTES

NOV. 15 - DEC. 15

The early part of this period was fairly warm even though the first day of it (Nov. 15th) produced the first snowflakes of the season. On December 4th, the first real winter freeze came with temperatures hitting the low 20's and not rising above freezing until the 8th.

Winter finches have been quite erratic this year. No PINE GROSBEAKS or WHITE-WINGED CROSSBILLS have been reported to date. There has been a report of a single COMMON REDPOLL at Kimball Sanctuary in Rhode Island on Nov. 17th. PINE SISKENS dropped off sharply after the early part of Nov., the only report of the period coming from Barn Is. on Nov. 16th. EVENING GROSBEAKS first showed up at a feeding station on Nov. 15th when 3 birds came to Hidden Acres in Mystic. That number has risen now to 14. Small numbers have since been reported also from N. Stonington, W. Mystic, Quaker Hill, New London and Waterford. The most abundant winter finch so far has been the RED CROSS-BILL, although unfortunately for most people they don't come to feeders and unless there are pine trees with cones on them, the birds don't stop at all, but pass overhead in flocks heading southwestward along the coast. They have been reported from Smith's Neck, Lyme, Rocky Neck, Peace Sanctuary, Mason's Island, Napatree Point, and Quonochontaug, R. I. The one flock that is staying around is a group of up to 34 birds that are feeding in heavily coned Scotch Pines on Enders Island, Mystic. Please report all winter finches seen in the area.

Saybrook and Lyme: Over 160 RUDDY DUCKS are in South Cove, Saybrook and 4 SNOW GEESE were in the Conn. River in Saybrook on Dec. 1st. On Nov. 26th, 6 REDHEADS were at Smith's Neck, Lyme and the first reported ROUGH-LEGGED HAWK was at Cooper's

Point on Dec. 3rd. A RED-BELLIED WOODPECKER is coming to a feeding station on Whipporwill Rd., Lyme.

Waterford and New London: A very late BLACK-THROATED GREEN WARBLER was at Magonk Point on Nov. 16th. Two interesting feeder reports in Quaker Hill were of a RED-BELLIED WOODPECKER on suet on Nov. 23rd and a YELLOW-BREASTED CHAT eating bittersweet berries on Dec. 2nd. The first COMMON GOLDENEYE was found at Harkness Park on Nov. 16th and a RED-NECKED GREBE was at Magonk Point on the 29th. Two BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT HERONS are still roosting at Millstone Point.

Groton, Mystic, and Stonington: On Nov. 17th in a backyard in Stonington there were a YELLOW-BREASTED CHAT, 2 BALTIMORE ORIOLES, 6 CEDAR WAXWINGS, and 2 HOUSE WRENS. An even later HOUSE WREN was found on Starr St., Mystic on Nov. 29th. On the Mystic River there are 63 COOT and 51 MUTE SWANS currently present. Thirteen CANVAS-BACKS were there on Nov. 19th. Four COMMON SNIPE were feeding in a flooded field on Shewville Rd., Ledyard on Nov. 15th and a LOGGERHEAD SHRIKE was in front of Stonington High School on the 28th. PURPLE SAND-PIPERS first arrived at Eastern Point on Nov. 17th. The banding program at the Peace Sanctuary on Nov. 23rd banded 34 birds of 6 species. Top bird of the period was a YELLOW-HEADED BLACKBIRD feeding with many cowbirds and red-wings from Dec. 5th on. This is Connecticut's 9th record of this western bird.

Rhode Island Shoreline: The two top birds seen at Napatree Point on Nov. 28th were not water birds, but land birds - a YELLOWTHROAT and an IPSWICH SPARROW. At Weekapaug there was a COMMON EIDER on Nov. 17th and 2 rare RAZOR-BILLED AUKS were at Quonochontaug on Nov. 29th and 30th.

Contributors to this column were: Mr. and Mrs. Kenneth Bates, Grace Bissell, Barbara Bonnano, Lawrence Brooks, Mrs. Charles Chapin, Marion Clarke, Bob and Mary Jean Dewire, Helen Gilman, Virginia Hatchell, Barbara Kashanski, Mary Laffargue, Bill Morgan, John Pillar, Eloise Saunders, Beth Schad, Paul Spitzer, William Willetts, and John Williams.

ACTIVITIES FOR JANUARY

January 4... 3:00 P.M. Audubon Wildlife Film. Dr. Roger Tory Peterson's "Galapagos - Wild Eden." See Page 10 for details.

January 10... All Day. An adult field trip to the Fal-mouth - Woods Hole Area of Cape Cod to include the Ashumet Holly Reserva-tion. Phone the Center for details.

January 17... 10:00 A.M. A Junior Workshop for mem-bers in Grades 3, 4 and 5. "Making a Bird Feeder." Registration required. Limit 10.

January 24... 8:00 A.M. Eastern Point to Groton Long Point. A car caravan field trip to look at the birds wintering along the coast. Meet at Eastern Point parking lot.

January 25... 3:00 P.M. Audubon Wildlife Film. Dr. John Bulger's "New England Saga." See page 10 for details.

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MICHAEL WALKER — *Curator*

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ROBERT DEWIRE
Editor

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